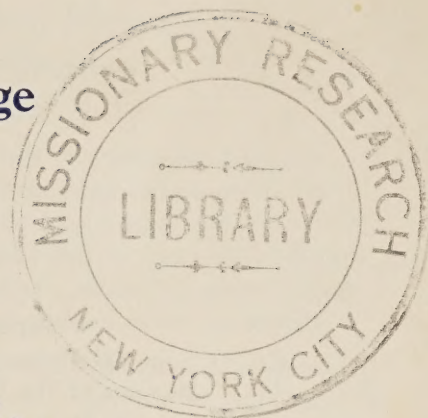


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# The Evangelical Message in Latin America



## PART I

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# The Evangelical Message in Latin America

I wish to begin by defining at least in a tentative way, this term "Evangelical message."\* For the purposes of this paper I am thinking particularly of the preaching message of the church in Latin America. I want to make sure that we have some idea of the theological framework which stands behind the observations I will be making in regard to the sub-themes to be considered.

Alan Richardson, in his well-known *Theological Word Book*, reminds us that in the New Testament, preaching has nothing to do with the delivery of sermons to the converted, which is what it usually means today, but always concerns the proclamation of the good tidings of God to the non-Christian world. This is the message about which I am concerned, the message of the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Peter Taylor Forsyth, in *Positive Preaching and the Modern Mind*, affirms his belief that preaching is the word of the Gospel returning in confession to God who gave it. It is directed towards men, of course, but it is offered to God. Here is the real genius of preaching. Here is the real message of the Evangelical Church.

Now let us consider briefly each sub-theme in the light of this understanding of the Evangelical message in Latin America.

## THE MESSAGE IN THE BEGINNINGS OF PROTESTANTISM IN LATIN AMERICA.

The term "beginnings" can surely be thought of as applying to the nineteenth Century, since even in 1900 there were only about 50,000 Protestants in the area which concerns us.

The first thing I would single out here is the place of the Bible. For a long while, the Bible itself was the only message. James Thomson, as his biographer, the late Juan Varetto, tells us, traveled heroically on behalf of Bible distribution as well as the Lancasterian school system from 1818, his arrival in Buenos Aires, to his death in 1854. The liberal men whom he contacted and who favored him – such as Rivadavia in Argentina, O'Higgins in Chile, and San Martin in Peru – soon gave way to more reactionary ele-

\* "Evangelical" is used in Latin America in preference to the word "Protestant"



ments, clerically inspired, who speedily put an end to this heretical device of making the scriptures available in living language.

For me, the typical presentation of the message in the nineteenth Century is exemplified by Francisco Penzotti, at the door of a dwelling in Arequipa, Peru, in 1889, open Bible in his hand, explaining the Gospel to the person who had answered the door. Of course, the displeasure of Rome was soon heaped upon him and he wound up in jail. But he was presenting the true Gospel. Penzotti and others like him taught that Jesus Christ lived, died and rose again from the dead, and that salvation came only through faith in Him, not through the doctrine of works set forth by the papal church.

Of course, this message in the beginnings, as in every age, has its lacks. It mirrors many of the lacks in the ante-bellum nineteenth Century Protestant proclamation in this country. There is little Biblical criticism, little systematic theology, little or no social Gospel. As American Protestantism lagged behind European Protestantism in these fields, so the Evangelical message in Latin America lagged behind North America.

It must be stated, however, that the core of Gospel truth was fairly presented. We can never cease to be grateful to James Thomson, Francisco Penzotti, Andrew Milne, John Francis Thomson and others like them. The late Don Carlos Turner, whose passing brought a real personal loss to me and I know to many of you, has said and written many times that the real beginnings of Protestantism can be attributed, humanly speaking, to the courageous colporteurs of the last century. The message in the beginnings, then, consisted primarily in placing in a man's hands the Word of life, and thereby introducing him to the Lord of life.

#### THE INFLUENCE OF U.S. THEOLOGY AND CULTURE ON THE LATIN AMERICAN MESSAGE.

This is difficult to ascertain empirically; and, as yet, we have no written history of theological thought in Latin American Protestantism. Dr. Raymond Valenzuela of the Methodist Church in Chile has done an exceptional piece of research on the history of philosophical thought and its relationship to the Gospel.

We can say that up until 1900, at least, there was little indigenous message; it was all borrowed. Someone may point out the

fine work of David Trumbull in Chile and Pablo Besson in Argentina in regard to proclaiming the position of the church before the state. Even then, these men were foreigners, one a North American and the other a Swiss.

#### THE INFLUENCE OF U.S. THEOLOGY ON THE LATIN AMERICAN MESSAGE

Fundamentalist theology has had the greatest influence. "The Bible says" has become "La Biblia dice" or even more dogmatically, "Dice la Palabra" Much Latin America theology resembles the theology of my alma mater, Princeton Seminary, in the days of Warfield and Hodge.

Has the post-World War I ferment in American theology spilled over at all into our sister churches? Yes. John Mackay's Preface to Christian Theology is in Spanish. The major positions of Reinhold Niebuhr are known and appreciated by many. There are outstanding theological thinkers among the North American missionaries active in Latin America, not the least of whom is President B. Foster Stockwell of the Facultad in Buenos Aires. But on the whole, until fairly recently, our brethren have had a "hand-me-down" type of theology, heavily weighted with a conservative outlook, insofar as U.S. influence is concerned.

#### THE INFLUENCE OF U.S. CULTURE ON THE LATIN AMERICAN MESSAGE.

This is truthfully too big a topic even to open at this point. Let me narrow it tremendously by saying that many facets of U.S. Protestant church culture have been normative in Latin American Protestant churches, at least in those with ecclesiastical ties in this direction. For instance, some of the "don'ts" have come along: don't drink, don't dance, don't smoke, and for women, don't paint your face. The customs, liturgical and otherwise, of church services and church school, have been followed. Even young people's movements have followed suit: many today in Latin America are like ours a generation ago when most of the young people were over thirty.

A good example of the cultural imitation which still persists is the custom of reading sermons. The early missionaries knew

the language imperfectly. Therefore they read their sermons. Despite the fact that they were working in their native language, the first Nationals aided the missionaries by reading their manuscripts.

## THE EXTENT OF THE INFLUENCE OF EUROPEAN THEOLOGY.

This is a disputed issue. Last year when *Cuadernos Teológicos* brought out a double number in honor of Karl Barth, I reported in the correspondence columns of *The Christian Century* my belief that the theology of neo-orthodoxy was enjoying an even wider vogue in Latin America. I held that opinion then and still do, despite the fact that my friend Alberto Merubia, known to many of you, took issue with me in a letter to the editor of the *Century*. Merubia's feeling is that a relatively small handful of Latin American ministers know anything about the European theological ferment that has been going on since Barth's *Römerbrief*.

Our front-rank theological seminaries in Latin America today, however, have faculties and student bodies acquainted with the works of Barth, Brunner, Cullman, Bultman, Maurty, and a host of other continental theologians, as well as English and Scots theologians to a lesser extent. Gutierrez-Marín of Spain has been a great popularizer of neo-orthodoxy in South America.

Our Bible Institute faculties and student bodies, as a rule are at least familiar enough with the names of these men to have some idea, albeit mistaken oftentimes, as to what they represent in the realm of theological thought. I wish to emphasize my own personal belief that this mainstream of theological thought will continue to grow and expand greatly and that the Latin American message will be presented to some extent through its categories. It is worthwhile noting that younger leaders in the historic denominations are apt to be well acquainted with neo-orthodoxy.

There are non-theological factors at work here: Latin America has always received ideas from Europe more eagerly than she has received them from the States. May this not also be true in the theological realm? And there are other practical reasons why I think this influence will grow: the presence in Latin America of more and more European thinkers on our theological faculties,



more and more of our Latin American Protestant students in Europe, the rising importance of European Christians in the Latin American Protestant community: for instance, Germans in Brazil, Chile and Argentina. Also note the translations into Spanish of books like Bosquejo de Dogmatica, (Barth), articles by many European thinkers in scholarly magazines like El Predicador Evangélico and Cuadernos Teológicos.

## APPRAISAL OF PRESENT DAY MESSAGE

### IN TERMS OF LIBERAL AND CONSERVATIVE TRENDS.

Now, in terms of conservative trends, it is worthwhile to remark that united evangelistic endeavors seem nearly always to require a general assent to a conservative viewpoint, especially in the Biblical realm. The only widespread cooperation has got to take place, apparently, under the aegis of the lowest common denominator. For instance, the biggest united campaign Buenos Aires has ever seen concluded a few days ago. These nightly meetings in Luna Park (a la Madison Square Garden) featured the preaching of Dr. Oswald Smith, independent conservative from the People's Church in Toronto. Evangelism is vital to the program of every group, thus cooperation was acceptable.

This may be only a personal opinion, but I feel that churches with the widest representation of the depressed classes tend to be the most conservative in their preaching message, and that this in turn reflects, among other things, the low educational level of the communicants, who very probably are not ready for anything except the simplest and least controversial truths of Protestantism.

Liberal trends in the present day message are a little harder to ferret out. There is a new theological ferment among the seminary graduates of the last ten to fifteen years which has a good many liberal overtones. For a number of years, for instance, the annual Instituto de Pastores at the Facultad in Buenos Aires has witnessed an informal Institutito, or little institute. In these extra meetings, the young ministers gather to exchange the latest wisdom from the theological halls of the continent, and they take themselves very seriously. Two factors which have helped generate this liberal interest are: 1) the Dead Sea Scrolls and what they signify for Biblical scholarship; and 2) a growing awareness of the theological implications of the ecumenical movement. Of course even this

last is much misunderstood. I have talked to leaders of the Plymouth Brethren who said: "We don't know who is right, McIntyre's International Council or the World Council, so we're staying out of both groups."

#### THE ABSENCE OF SOCIAL JUSTICE IN THE MESSAGE.

There would seem to be plenty for the church to be preaching about in this realm, someone would say. What about revolutions? Of course in Latin America revolutions usually concern personalities rather than policies. Under Peron, for instance, many Argentine Evangelical congregations were so divided in their opinions about him that open pulpit pronouncements would have broken up these churches. Also, Argentina under Peron, to continue to use this example, was ostensibly carrying forward a program of social betterment: socialized medicine, job insurance, pensions, higher pay, better working conditions, and the like.

In a sense, Peron's justicialismo took the play away from the churches. In general, it is hard for our brethren to preach about social issues. War is an academic problem for them. They are not directly involved, or at least do not often think of themselves as directly involved in the current east-west power struggle. Race tends to be also an academic problem with them. The chief social problem with which the church would want to deal today is inflation, and the leadership of the church is not technically competent to deal with this issue.

Be that as it may, it is worthwhile noting that our Communist foes in Latin America ring the changes on social justice. Any blank wall is likely to read: vote communist for better playgrounds; vote communist for shorter hours; vote communist for more schools and hospitals. It does seem that our Evangelical brethren might develop and express through their message more discontent with the obvious inequities of the Latin American welfare state.

#### EFFECTIVENESS OF THE MESSAGE IN REGARD TO RELIGIOUS INSTRUCTION.

I would say that the basic New Testament kerygma has been communicated to the membership. Our Latin American church members usually bring their Bibles to church. They hear messages



with a much heavier doctrinal content than that to which we are accustomed in this country, as you are aware. "Pealism" is practically unknown in their pulpits. Our preaching brethren there also have some other advantages. Christianity is new to most people, despite the nominal overlay of Romanism. The people are not jaded with magazines and television to the extent that ours are. And religious education through the proclamation of the Gospel is extremely needful, because so many Protestants come from a nominal Roman Catholic background which has imparted no body of knowledge. Even the Catholic parochial schools are jokingly said to teach nothing but the lives of the saints. But I would say that the Protestant message in Latin America from the beginning has had a didactic flavor, which of course is not foreign to but rather a part of New Testament Christianity.

#### THE TYPE OF EVANGELISTIC MESSAGE PROCLAIMED.

It is hard to generalize, because there is such a tremendous variety of evangelistic activity. On the one hand, you have the Salvation Army people, who hold open air evangelistic services on crowded corners and put down a rug on the sidewalk for their converts to kneel upon. Raw, effective, genuine evangelism. On the other hand you have some of the older foreign language churches where nothing even remotely resembling an evangelistic message is ever heard.

In many of our historic denominations with a missionary background it is quite common to have cultos de evangelización, which often turn out to be mere preaching and revival missions, but which sometimes do have an evangelistic impact because the members invite their friends and neighbors to hear the preaching of Jesus Christ. These sermons are faithful to the New Testament witness, in that they invite those present to receive Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who gave his life upon the cross to reconcile them to God. They truly present "the truth as it is in Jesus." I have an impression that in services of this type "Jesus" is more talked about than "Christ" but this is not the time to analyze this or to discuss its implications.

#### EMPHASIS OF PENTECOSTAL GROUPS

The annual Carnahan Lectures at the Union Theological Seminary in Buenos Aires, given in June of this year by the Rev.

Dr. Henry Pitney Van Dusen, addressed themselves to the theme of the Holy Spirit, thus reflecting the concern of historic Protestantism for this doctrine to which so large an emphasis is given in the Pentecostal message.

If you were actually to attend a Pentecostal service in Chile, for example, you might be disappointed. The sermon tends to be long, repetitious, poorly delivered, and full of allegorical and typological interpretations, some of which are quite questionable. And yet, the message is effective, because at this service you will see men and women from the underprivileged classes who are clearly listening and understanding. You sense a majority feeling which is usually lacking in Latin American Protestantism.

Just a few blocks from the Union Seminary in Buenos Aires is a Pentecostal church founded by a Danish group, which is always packed on Sunday afternoons with about 1500 people. There are obviously some people of education present and they seem to be more impressed with what is happening than they do with the message. It is the total emphasis that impresses one at a Pentecostal service.

Some time ago I wrote a brief article entitled Las iglesias históricas frente a las iglesias no-históricas, which was reprinted in a number of Pentecostal magazines. I said in this article that the Pentecostal churches had something to say to the so-called historic churches because 1) they are indigenous, 2) they demand much from their members, 3) they give free rein to the emotions, and 4) they emphasize the doctrine of the Holy Spirit, faith healing and other aspects of the Biblical message not given a primary place in the traditional witness.

#### MORAL AND SOCIAL INFLUENCE ON SOCIETY OF THE EVANGELICAL MESSAGE.

The moral influence of the Evangelical message has not yet reached the point where you can leave things unlocked in Latin America the way you can in most parts of the U.S.A. The typical missionary who returns to this country on furlough rushes out before dark each night to put away his children's toys and to lock everything up — at least until he gets used to living in the States again.

Although society in general has been affected only slightly if at all, a number of individuals have responded dramatically to the

moral claims of the Evangelical message. There is a saying in Chile, *Hay que buscar un canuto*. This means that if you want an honest workman, find a Protestant.

In Argentina we speak of *coima*. In Mexico the word is *mordida*. The bribe, whatever you call it, is a part of daily life and even the Evangelical is sometimes caught up in it! I know a leading Methodist layman in Argentina who once came in from Uruguay saying "don't touch me or I'll bounce." He had concealed springs in every pocket of his coat, vest and trousers. He needed a new set of springs for his car and since they were unobtainable in Argentina he had simply brought them in "contraband" from Uruguay. He saw nothing wrong with what he had done. In fact, perhaps there wasn't. At any rate, it is discouraging sometimes to contemplate the a-morality of Latin American life. The Evangelical message has yet to make its definitive moral impact upon that life.

As regards social influence and the Evangelical message, a more positive statement can be made. The Protestant witness in regard to the Christian home has been extremely influential and beneficial in Latin America. Our churches in the last few years have enjoyed the annual *campamento de familias* on a hitherto undreamed of scale. Also in regard to courtship customs, Protestantism is making some positive thrusts.

Furthermore, our Latin American neighbors are always impressed with the family status of the Protestant clergy. Ever so many will tell you that they do not believe in the celibacy of the priesthood. In fact a leading Argentine society woman for several years has been carrying on a campaign to get the Argentine Roman Catholic hierarchy to declare celibacy out of bounds as a policy of that church. She has sent circulars to Catholic clergymen all over the Spanish-speaking world, giving detailed theological, exegetical and social arguments against celibacy. Her son is a priest. I am not sure how much credit Protestantism can take for this turn of events, but some at least is due the Evangelical message.

## EVALUATION OF THE MISSIONARY EMPHASIS IN THE MESSAGE.

My feeling is that the missionary emphasis in the Evangelical message in Latin America is clear and strong, that there has been a coming of age in this respect and that the church in Latin



America compares favorably to any of the younger churches in this regard. Our brethren to the south would agree with Professor Otto Piper's doctrine of Biblical realism at least to the extent of admitting with no argument whatsoever that the New Testament faith is essentially a missionary faith.

Biblical realism, on the one hand, and non-theological factors on the other are responsible, I believe, for this missionary emphasis. These other factors, for instance, include such things as travels of national Evangelical leaders to each other's countries and to other parts of the world as well. And this emphasis on mission is no theory. For instance, at the present moment, workers of the Methodist Church in Argentina are serving in Uruguay, Paraguay, Bolivia, Chile, Peru and the United States. This could be worked out for other denominations and countries, of course.

Another way in which the missionary emphasis can be felt is the reaction to suggestions of men like John Baillie that the nominal Roman Catholic population of Latin America does not constitute a mission field. I believe that the Evangelical church truly conceives of itself as a mission. My friend and colleague Bishop Barbieri has often reminded Latin Evangelicals of the, as yet unmet, responsibilities of work among indigenous and rural populations, labor groups, student groups and other intelligentsia.

There is one qualification which needs to be mentioned: the missionary emphasis in the Evangelical message in Latin America does not yet include to a very great extent the world outside Latin America. This is natural. In due time there will be, I am sure, the feeling that Latin American Evangelicals are responsible for the evangelization not only of Latin America but of the whole oikumene. With men like Bishop Barbieri bringing a first-hand knowledge of the World Church into the Latin American scene, with men like D.T. Niles, Kagawa, Hans Lilje and others bringing the story of their churches into Latin America, with Latin Americans represented in ever increasing numbers at Evanston, Willingen, and other ecumenical gatherings, this extra-continental emphasis will doubtless come to be a genuine part of the missionary understanding of the Latin American church.

## STATEMENT OF A NEW EMPHASIS THAT MIGHT MAKE A STRONGER MESSAGE.

In general, the Evangelical message seems to me to need a continuing practical application to every-day life. We all know how strong our Latin brethren are in the realm of thought. Sometimes as I have heard sermons which are delightful in their Biblical and theological aspects, I have wished for a larger portion of Yankee practicality, if you will, somewhere along the line. The *kerygma* is there, but I wonder if there does not need to be more *didache*, especially in the sense of relating the Gospel to life in its daily sense.

Also I make bold to suggest that the Evangelical message for Latin America needs more social content. I know we all agree that Jesus Christ died for each individual. I know we all rejoice in sound evangelical piety. But I am concerned because no Rauschenbusch has as yet risen in Latin America, to ring the changes on the social applications of the Gospel.

Where there has been a social emphasis, it has been much too shallow and too sectarian. Richard Shaull tells of a young Colombian who, after some contact with the Evangelical church, became a Communist. Later he told Shaull, "You Protestants always say 'Don't drink', 'don't dance', 'don't smoke'. But the Communists are interested in giving us better jobs, better homes, more education."

We know, of course, despite Communist blandishments, that only the Protestant church has the word for the social and economic problems that bear in so heavily upon the Latin American nations today. Christ's Church in Latin America must seek out this word, and then communicate it to a society that is truly suffering. No church ever faced a more demanding challenge than this, in any age!

## INFLUENCE OF LITURGICAL EMPHASIS ON MESSAGE.

Only a few of our brethren in Latin America have lost their horror of Rome. The Evangelical message comes to the people in stark fashion: no candles, no bells, no robes, no incense . . . to put it ungrammatically: 'No nuthin'.' One of the leading Protestant ministers of the River Plate was horrified when the first Protestant church he ever visited in the States had a cross and candles on the Lord's Table.

When there is a liturgical emphasis it tends to be morbid and forlorn, as for instance, the use of the confession of sins. At our seminary, during a thirty-minute chapel service, the students would often take as much as ten minutes for the confession and absolution. One of our non-liturgical missionaries walked out more than one time because of this emphasis, which did not seem to be reflected in changed lives or true repentance.

Also, when there is a minister with a liturgical emphasis, at least outside Lutheran or Anglican circles, it is very hard for him to get it across. One of our most erudite suburban congregations near Buenos Aires fought the minister bitterly when he introduced what were really sound and constructive liturgical reforms.

When there can be a sound liturgical emphasis, it will make easier, I believe, the task of winning nominal Roman Catholics for Christ. They still make remarks like this, *En la iglesia de Uds., no hay santos, verdad?* A number of our students on occasion went to the basilica of San Jose de Flores, five blocks from the seminary, to attend mass just to see what the competition was doing, so to speak. Staunch Protestants all, they were admittedly moved by the ceremony, the mystery, the showmanship, the music. Why should we let all this be the exclusive province of Romans?

Let me say a word about something in which I am very much interested personally: hymnology. For several years a committee of experts representing nearly ten denominations in the River Plate has been working on a new Evangelical hymnal. Although not an expert I sat with the committee and sincerely believe that the new hymnal (to be published in about two years) will be one of the finest hymnals in any language, from theological, musical and liturgical viewpoints.

#### SUGGESTIONS OF HOW TO MAINTAIN THE FERVOR AND VITALITY OF THE LATIN AMERICAN CHURCH.

(Let me say that I do not presume at this point to tell our Latin American brethren how to do their job – I believe them to be quite capable of doing it well – I only wish to throw out a few suggestions).

The first concerns the life of prayer. The spirit of pure devotion which burned in the hearts of Santa Teresa de Jesus, Luis de Granada, Luis de Leon, Juan de la Cruz, to whose writings John Mackay introduced me years ago, this spirit needs to recrudescence



among Protestants today in Latin America. The *Biblioteca Lopez* at the Union Seminary in Buenos Aires has hundreds of volumes written during the Golden Age of Spain by men and women of a distinctly Protestant frame of mind. There is a wealth of devotion in the Iberian soul that needs to be brought to the fore in the Evangelical tradition.

The second suggestion concerns this; that the Evangelical message must not be delayed any longer but rather reach out into unevangelized areas. Preaching, we said at the outset, in the New Testament sense, means the proclamation of Christ to the unevangelized. To do this, the problem of the introverted church needs to be overcome. Just ninety years ago John Francis Thomson preached the first sermon in Spanish ever heard in Argentina. Three generations have passed and the ever-present danger is that the church will settle into a routine. Dr. Kenneth Scott Latourette says that nowhere in the Christianity of the twentieth century has there been more rapid growth than in the Latin America Protestant church: from 50,000 in 1900 to 250,000 in 1914 to more than five million on the threshold of 1958. If we keep on in this fashion we will get to these hitherto unevangelized areas.

A third suggestion concerns the education of the ministry. President Nathan Pusey of Harvard spoke a month ago at the dedication of the Robert Speer Library in Princeton. Among other things he said: "This library . . . says eloquently that the enduring first need of the Church is for a learned ministry, for a continuing succession of those scholar-teachers who shall not need to be ashamed and shall not fail to help the churches to do their work in the world because they will have been qualified rightly to divide the word of truth." To maintain the fervor and vitality of the Latin American church, educate the ministry.

My friend Dick Shaull, professor at the Presbyterian seminary in Campinas, Brasil, gave the missions lectures at Princeton two weeks ago. He suggested five areas of concern for the future of the Latin American church: 1) Theology, in regard to the discovery of the nature of the church, 2) new patterns in the church's life, that she may truly become a community of witness, 3) lay participation, 4) a sharing of the common life, and 5) discipline.

Here, then, is the message of the Evangelical church in Latin America. May God's Holy Spirit enrich and use this message to fulfill His plan for Christ's kingdom in Latin America today!

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